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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups: tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

Statement submitted by the Foundation for the Rights of the Family, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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"The goals and objectives of social development require continuous efforts to reduce and eliminate major sources of social distress and instability for the family and for society ....."
(Copenhagen Declaration paragraph A.20, World Summit for Social Development 5-12 March 1995)

"Helping the family in its supportive, educating and nurturing roles in contributing to social integration ....."
(Copenhagen Programme of Action paragraph 81, World Summit for Social Development, 5-12 March 1995)

"Recognize that the family is the basic unit of society and that it plays a key role in social development and is a strong force of social cohesion and integration ....."
(Twenty-fourth Special Session of the General Assembly, "Further initiatives for social development", paragraph 56, Geneva 26 June-1 July 2000)

THE FAMILY AS CARE-GIVER

It is a known fact that social expenditure increases at a greater speed than the gross national product; and that families, being closer to the problems affecting their members, can better solve them and assume full responsibilties through a shared solidarity.

The family, a sensitive issue in every society, is the first and most important socializing institution, where shelter and security are to be found when difficulties arise. It is through the family that family members become integrated into community life.

The manifold functions that the family naturally performs is not only of paramount importance to its individual members bult also to the society at large. The role and functions of the family cannot be seen as exclusively private concerns but rather as public matter in constant interaction with demographic, cultural, political, legal and economic phenomena.

The family exists in all culture in different behaviours and patterns, and in each culture it represents an essential component in the life of its members. The presence of the family is a precondition for the growth of individuals, just as its absence is often the cause of a destabilizing void.

THE FAMILY AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Public sector effectiveness is driven by the relationship between invested resources and the results obtained.

The resources are diverse and particularly of an economic and human character.The results are intended to reflect the dimension of the impingement of public policies on the diagnosis and solution of social needs. An example of an effective public sector is one that uses the taxes collected to solve social problems.

There is a close relationship between the solution of social problems and the family as a social group. The family is an important social agent because:

- Future citizens are raised and developed by receiving health and nutrition care as well as education within the family.

- Families take responsibility for the problems involved in the incorporation of youth to the labour market and support the significant economic cost of professional training (via universities and/or technical schools) and the permanence of unemployed sons and daughters in the household.

- The relationship between parents and children is decisive in situations of crisis (i.e. delinquency, drug-addiction, unwanted pregnancies, HIV/AIDS).

- Most families provide care and assistance for the elderly, especially in the case of permanent incapacities.

All the above show that the public sector, thanks to families in their care-giving role, can be effective with the same or fewer resources. As a matter of fact, the reduction of social services provided by the welfare state is nowadays an increasing trend owing to economic recession (see the examples of France and Germany, among others).

Therefore, children, youth and disabled and elderly family members, all benefit from a readily available network parallel to the State, with considerable savings on resources for the State.

A DECLARATION ON THE ROLE, RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS OF THE FAMILY

Societies all over the world recognize and assign a number of societal functions, responsibilities – and corresponding rights – to the family. In many instances, these are stated in national constitutions and laws, whereas in others they are informally recognized through traditions and social norms.

There is, however, an unbalance between the attention centered on the individual in United Nations Declarations, Conventions, Covenants and Conferences, and the low profile afforded to the family.

The family, as a social group, constitutes by itself a situation entitled to juridical protection. This is why the procreative, educational and socializing functions — the sole responsibility of families — should be protected through a declaration on the role, responsibilities and rights of the family.

Such rights of the family – without distinction as to race, language, culture, religion, political or other opinions – are, among others, the right to:

Social protection; privacy and security; independence and autonomy; the transmission of certain moral and cultural values; a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of family members; housing; health and social security; educational systems and institutions.

These family rights should not enter into conflict with those of family members – in particular the hard-won rights of women – but, on the contrary, should complement individual rights for the full development of family members.

The consideration of these family rights is important because it is in the family – "the natural and fundamental group unit of society" – where we are really conscious of having a name and an identity, where we share our most intimate feelings and soothe the anxiety caused by the problems of our complex society.

A declaration on the role, responsibilities and rights of the family would be an important feature of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, and a reminder for further mainstreamed action on behalf of the family in the plans and programmes of the United Nations.

We would, therefore, suggest to this Commission for Social Development that an open-ended group be created for the purpose of working out a declaration on the role, responsibilities and rights of the family.

Such a group could extract from national laws, international instruments and existing draft declarations and charters, provisions on the family as a basis for the articulation of such a Declaration, a project already referred to by the General Assembly in operative paragraph 20 of its resolution 47/237 of 8 October 1993, and mentioned in past sessions of this Commission by a number of Delegations.